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ABSTRACT

The Illinois Systems of Public Higher Education are described and analyzed. The final result of a decade of rapid expansion in Illinois was a state system of higher education that consists of four governance systems for senior universities and a community college system, involving 12 universities and five coordinating staffs. It is the responsibility of each system executive officer to coordinate the affairs of all the universities within each system. The coordinator in turn reports to his board as do the presidents of each of the member institutions. Each coordinating officer has a staff of professionals who assist in developing budgets and new academic programs. They participate with the presidents in making recommendations to the governing boards in virtually all areas that concern the member universities. All proposals for budgets and new programs must be approved by each system board before it can be forwarded to the Board of Higher Education where the final decisions are made on academic programs and budget. The Boards of Higher Education also maintain large professional staffs to review budgets and academic programs providing a second opportunity to review and coordinate overall budgets as well as individual university budgets. (Author/SPG)

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LARGE SYSTEMS IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

James H. Mullen*

During the halcyon years of the 1960's when state systems of higher education were expanding at prodigious rates, the great states of California, Illinois and New York emerged as the leaders and champions of public higher education. These systems were the pacemakers during this period, and for many other state systems, the paradigms for organizational structures and governance systems.

In the 1960's not only did the dollar amount increase, but also the percentage of total state appropriations going to higher education increased substantially. Both private and public sectors of higher education grew rapidly but by far the greatest expansion took place within the public sector.

Expansion in most state systems was achieved through existing Land Grant and regional teacher institutions. The latter were transformed from single purpose teacher colleges to general purpose regional colleges and universities. In 1965, for example, the state of Illinois broke ground for a large downtown campus in Chicago, known as University of Illinois, Chicago Circle Center, which was completed six years later. In 1965 a branch campus of Southern Illinois University was also authorized in Edwardsville, Illinois, across the river from St. Louis. Both were approved by the Illinois Board of

* The author was a participant in two large systems of higher education during this period: Illinois and New Jersey.

Higher Education which was created in 1961 as the State's overall legal authority for public higher education.

During 1965, the Board of Governors of State Colleges and Universities was also created as the successor to the Illinois Teachers College System. At the same time, the Board of Higher Education chartered and transferred to the Board of Governors system two City of Chicago teachers colleges which became Chicago State University and Northeastern Illinois University and the four former state teachers colleges which became Illinois State University, Northern Illinois University, Eastern Illinois University and Western Illinois University.

In 1969 two new experimental upper division universities were authorized -- Governors State University, in south suburban Chicago, and Sangamon State University, in Springfield. By 1974 the State of Illinois System of Higher Education included twelve senior universities and more than thirty community colleges. Such rapid expansion was bound to create many new problems. Notwithstanding, the problems of governance were not seriously addressed. One of the most obvious directions would have been to create a separate governing board for each university where they did not already exist, but the Board of Higher Education apparently believed the existing system of six universities under one eight-person governing board was adequate.

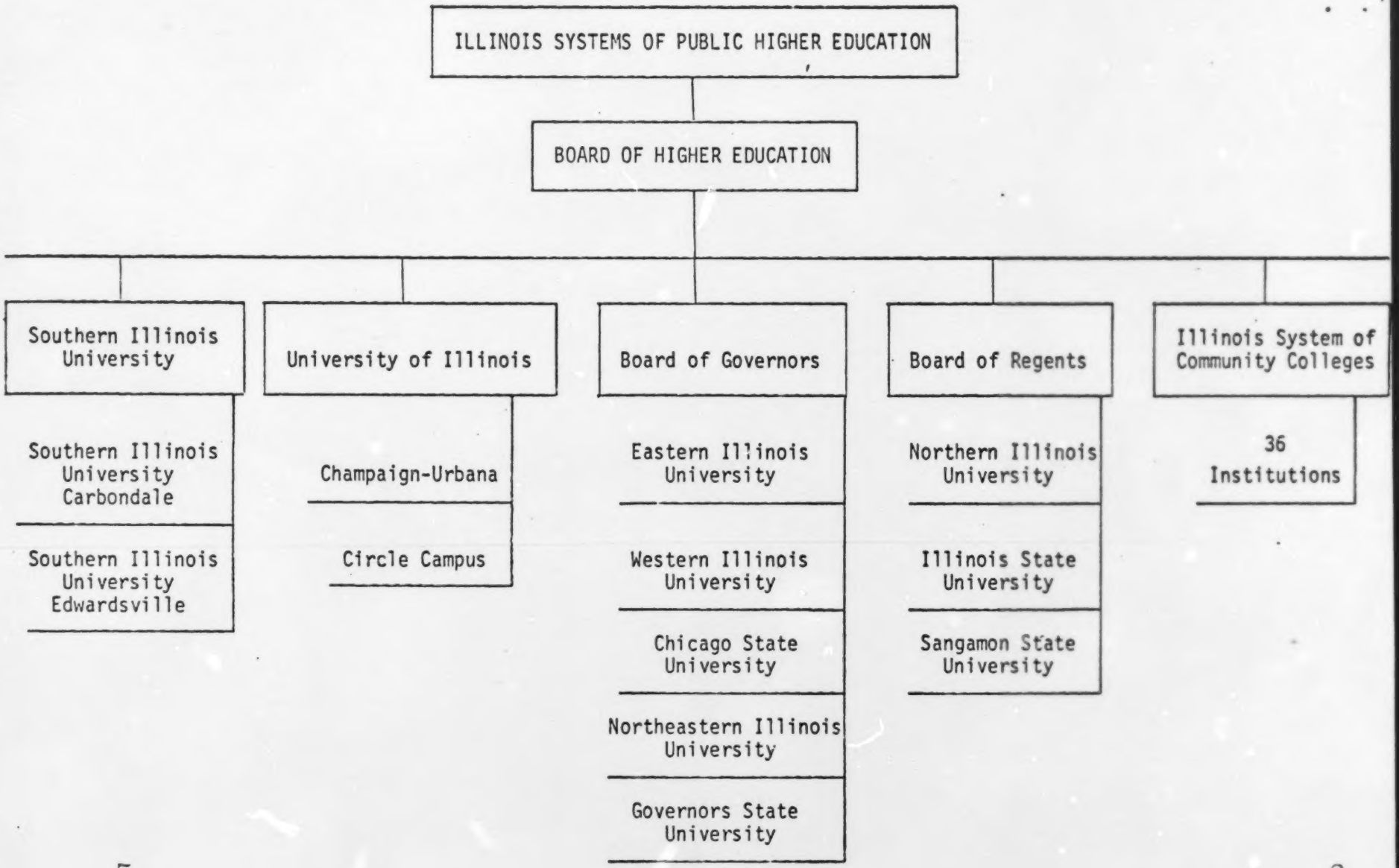
Neither the University of Illinois nor Southern Illinois University were interested in divesting themselves of their new regional satellites. Instead, the six-university Board

of Governors System and the Southern Illinois System found what appeared to be a solution in the creation of a system-wide corrdinating administrative office while the University of Illinois created chancellorships on each of its campuses responsible to the President of the University. With the addition of the two new experimental colleges in 1969, the Board of Higher Education finally realized that further expansion of the Board of Governors System would create an impossible governance situation.

The Board of Higher Education in 1969 elected to create a fourth system, the Illinois Board of Regents. Northern Illinois University and Illinois State University were transferred -- shuffled might be a better term because there was no rationale given for the decision that was made. Sangamon State University was added to make a three-university system and Governors State University was added to the Board of Governors System.

The final result of a decade of rapid expansion was a state system of higher education that consisted of four governance systems for senior universities and a community college system, twelve universities and five coordinating staffs.

In a complex system such as Illinois', the system coordinator emerges as the key figure in ultimate decision making, whatever title he may hold.


ILLINOIS SYSTEMS OF PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
Southern Illinois University
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
University of Illinois
Champaign-Urbana
Circle Campus
Board of Governors
Eastern Illinois University
Western Illinois University
Chicago State University
Northeastern Illinois University
Governors State University
Board of Regents
Northern Illinois University
Illinois State University
Sangamon State University
Illinois System of Community Colleges
36 Institutions

5

6

It is the responsibility of each system executive officer to coordinate the affairs of all the universities within each system. The coordinator in turn reports to his Board as do the presidents of each of the member institutions. Each coordinating officer has a staff of professionals who assist in developing budgets, new academic programs, and the like. They participate with the presidents in making recommendations to the governing boards in virtually all areas which concern the member universities. All proposals for budgets and new programs must be approved by each system board before it can be forwarded to the Board of Higher Education where the final decisions are made on Academic programs and budget. The Boards of Higher Education also maintain large professional staffs to review budgets and academic programs and thus provides a second opportunity to review and coordinate overall system budgets as well as individual university budgets.

In the early years of the Illinois "System of Systems" the Board of Higher Education worked closely with individual presidents who had regular access to the Office of the Executive Director of the Board of Higher Education, but with rapidly increasing growth and complexity the Board of Higher Education has virtually discontinued direct contact with the individual universities. Clearly this new approach to coordination simplified the work of the staff of the Board of Higher Education but has forced the Board of Higher Education to rely almost entirely on the recommendations of the systems' executive officers and their staffs.

While in theory the presidents have the same authority in their relationships with their Board, they more frequently find themselves at a disadvantage because of their lack of direct knowledge of both the decision making process and the final decisions between the Board of Higher Education and the executive officers. The latter, by virtue of their pivotal position, can control the flow of knowledge both upward and downward, this to the detriment of the universities and sometimes the Board of Higher Education. Under such circumstances the system heads achieve tremendous power in the bureaucratic process and if unscrupulous in the exercise of that power can become virtually arbiters of the mission, funding and destiny of these universities within that system. While most persons in this position may be reasonably scrupulous, there are no effective checks and balances against those who covet inordinate power.

In Illinois the cost of the double system is substantial. The operating budgets for the system's chief coordinators and their staffs are approaching $5 million per annum and growing.

There are, of course, many obstacles to be overcome in the process of streamlining any complex system. New legislation would be required to amend the Higher Education Act and all those voices with vested interests would fight changes that would eliminate high salaried jobs and prestigious appointments on system boards. Inertia is a significant element, one which favors the status quo. Few legislators, let alone citizens, are knowledgeable about the issues or the mechanisms of state systems of higher education. Increasing complexity, not simplification are the modalities of behavior in large systems. Parkinsons' law rules triumphantly without the knowledge of the citizen-taxpayer. More government, rather than less government, is the inevitable result of such a process.

Although the Illinois System of Systems is an outstanding example of proliferation and waste, it is in no way a unique phenomenon. Large and small states alike have followed the example of New York, California and Illinois in the name of coordination, accountability and responsibility. Under these shibboleths, more and more centralization has been achieved. Institutional goals have given way to systems' goals and, in case of those universities and colleges which do not have their

own individual governing boards, subjugation and regimentation has become the inevitable institutional way of life. Diversity becomes a cardinal sin and academic programs in one institution which may be similar to those in other institutions must be prevented. Coordinating agencies will, therefore, be predisposed to disapprove a new program in University X because there is a similar program at University Y, which may be thirty-five miles away from University X. Such a simplistic view assumes that students can easily commute seventy miles a day to attend classes in University Y. Duplication is almost always necessary if there is to be sufficient diversity of programs within each institution.

Some amount of coordinating by a central agency is undoubtedly here to stay in large public systems, but a coordinating function which holds college administrators responsible for the operation of their universities but which unduly restricts their authority to provide the necessary programs to achieve these goals will inevitably result in confusion and adversaryship. Ultimately, it harms the educational process and increases the burden of the taxpayer.

As the role of the presidents and other university officers declines in the decision making process and the power of the central bureaucracy grows, the prospects of improving educational opportunities and achieving higher quality education for the students also appears to dwindle.

The values emphasized by regulatory agencies are exemplified in such devices as pre and post audits. In many large state systems multiple audits involve state bureaus of the budget, audits by legislative committees and the governor's office in addition to those carried out by the staffs of the Boards of Higher Education.

The values emphasized by the institutions -- improving quality of academic programs, diversity of curricula, and growth -- clash violently and create adversary positions. Compromise agreements are frequently achieved only after considerable blood has been spent. Depending on the economic situation in the state, agreements may be generous or miserly. Political factors, particularly upcoming elections, will influence the turn of events. Large systems in higher education tend to grow not withstanding the efforts of various regulatory agencies. Faculty tenure and promotion ladders virtually insure that large systems will continue to grow. The funding of continuing and new research is yet another source of growth in major universities. Contract research, federal and state grants including student aid will continue to assure growth. Only serious economic decline in the economy will alter this pattern.

In contrast small, independent institutions with little or no endowment monies are likely to experience instability during periods of economic and demographic decline. Top leadership in higher education will continue to be unstable in both large systems and small colleges because college presidents

in all institutions of higher learning are faced with growing commitments to new constituencies both within and outside the campus. In this situation he can but attempt to adapt to changing pressures and hope to balance the various contending forces which surround him. The current average tenure of chief executives is approximately four years which suggests that he has not been very successful so far.

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